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ABSTRACT

Two community-based, family-focused programs were developed to intervene with risk and resiliency factors (self-esteem, assertiveness, and family and peer relations) hypothesized to impact on drug abuse. Both programs served youth and their parents or guardians. Substance Use Prevention and Education Resource Through Arts and Recreation (SUPER STARS) targeted youth between the ages of 6 and 10. Substance Use Prevention and Education Resource (SUPER II) targeted youth aged 11 to 17. Significant findings in SUPER STARS evaluation included an increase in racial pride and problem solving skills for parents and an increase in cultural awareness for youth. In SUPER II, significant findings included an increase in assertiveness and self-esteem of youth, and an increase in knowledge of drugs and knowledge of communication in both youth and parents. Although the participants' reported drug use was minimal both before and after the program, strengthening resiliency factors may help protect these youth from future drug use. These findings offer support for the implementation of multi-faceted prevention and intervention efforts to prevent and reduce the incidence of substance use among high-risk youth. (Author/NB)

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Community-based, Family-focused Prevention of Youth Substance Use

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Abstract

Two community-based, family-focused programs were developed to intervene with risk and resiliency factors hypothesized to impact on drug abuse. Both programs served youth and their parents or guardians; one (SUPER STARS) targeted youth between the ages of 6 and 10, and the other (SUPER II) targeted youth aged 11 to 17. Significant findings in SUPER STARS included an increase in racial pride and problem solving skills for parents and an increase in cultural awareness for youth. In SUPER II, significant findings included an increase in assertiveness and self-esteem of youth, and an increase in knowledge of drugs and knowledge of communication in both youth and parents. These findings offer support for the implementation of multi-faceted prevention and intervention efforts to prevent and reduce the incidence of substance use among high-risk youth.

The prevalence of youthful substance use and substance-related problems in our society make their prevention an important social goal (Dusenbury, 1989; Logan, 1991). The younger the age of experimentation, the greater the risk for problems with drugs later in life (Botvin, 1987). Consequently, substance abuse prevention efforts should attempt to reduce the incidence of substance use among youth, and at the very least, should aim to delay experimentation as long as possible until other coping skills have also been developed (Newcomb and Bentler, 1988).

A number of risk factors have been identified as predictors of substance use including low self-esteem (Kaplan et al., 1984), low assertiveness (Millman and Botvin, 1983), and poor family and peer relations (Kandel, 1980). Despite the extensive research on substance use, there is little literature which documents the effectiveness of community-based substance abuse prevention programs that attempt to modify these risk factors (Logan, 1991).

This study examined the extent to which certain risk and resiliency factors can be modified within high risk youth and their environments through the intervention, and in turn, the extent to which this intervention effects substance use. These factors were targeted in Substance Use Prevention and Education Resource Through Arts and Recreation (SUPER STARS), and Substance Use Prevention and Education Resource (SUPER II), two community-based programs which were designed to fulfill the need for culturally relevant, multi-faceted prevention and early

intervention programs for high risk youth and their parents or guardians in the metro-Atlanta area.

The SUPER STARS program served African-American youth between the ages of six and ten and their parents or guardians. SUPER STARS emphasized the development of cultural identity and pride among participants as a means of enhancing the resiliency factors of self-esteem and family relations. The content of the sessions focused on cultural legacy, family communication, the role of extended family, and decision making. Program topics were presented through culturally-relevant artistic and recreational activities such as African dance, story-telling, and mime.

The SUPER II program, which served youth between the ages of ten and seventeen and their parents or guardians, focused on increasing knowledge of drugs and family communication of all participants, and assertiveness, resistance to peer pressure, and self-esteem of youth. Program topics were presented through videos, presentations from program leaders and outside sources, and various interactive activities including role-playing and group discussions.

Method

Sample

The sample consisted of individuals who participated in either SUPER STARS or SUPER II programs between September 1991 and December 1992. Both programs were delivered in Boys and Girls Clubs; in addition, SUPER II was delivered in juvenile court sites. Participation was voluntary at the community agency sites and mandated for adolescent offenders at the court sites.

Procedures

The core program of SUPER STARS and SUPER II consisted of 7 two-hour evening sessions. Youth and parents/guardians met separately for peer and parenting sessions during 2 of the 7 evenings. The remainder of each program was conducted as family sessions with youth and parents/guardians meeting together.

The outcome of each program was measured by a pretest-posttest and follow-up assessment of the targeted youth population and their parents or guardians. Also, for SUPER II participants at court sites, a sample of juvenile court records was obtained before and after implementation of the program. For both programs, youth and their parents or guardians were matched on pre and post (outcome) measures and youth within this sample were matched on follow-up (impact) measures as well. Questionnaires were administered to youth and parents/guardians at the beginning and end of SUPER STARS and SUPER II core sessions, as well as three months after the completion of the program.

RESULTS

SUPER STARS

Univariate t-tests were used to analyze both the youth and parent/guardian data to determine what changes occurred from the pre-test to the post-test. Statistically significant findings include the following:

Parent/Guardian Results

* Improvement in all outcome scales: **racial pride, family communication, conflict resolution, and problem solving** (See Figure 1).

* Improvement in single variable items, including: **self-esteem, pride in family history, belief that own family is an ideal family, and knowledge of appropriate ways to cope with stress and anger.**

Youth Results

* Improvement in **cultural awareness outcome scale** (See Figure 2).

* Improvement in the following single variable items: **how well they like themselves, how well they like the way they look, pride in family history, talk to their parents about a problem, and talk to an adult when feeling bad.**

As expected, no significant change occurred in substance use from the pre-test to the follow-up measure given that reported use was negligible at each evaluation.

Figure 1

1992 Superstars Evaluation Results -- Adults

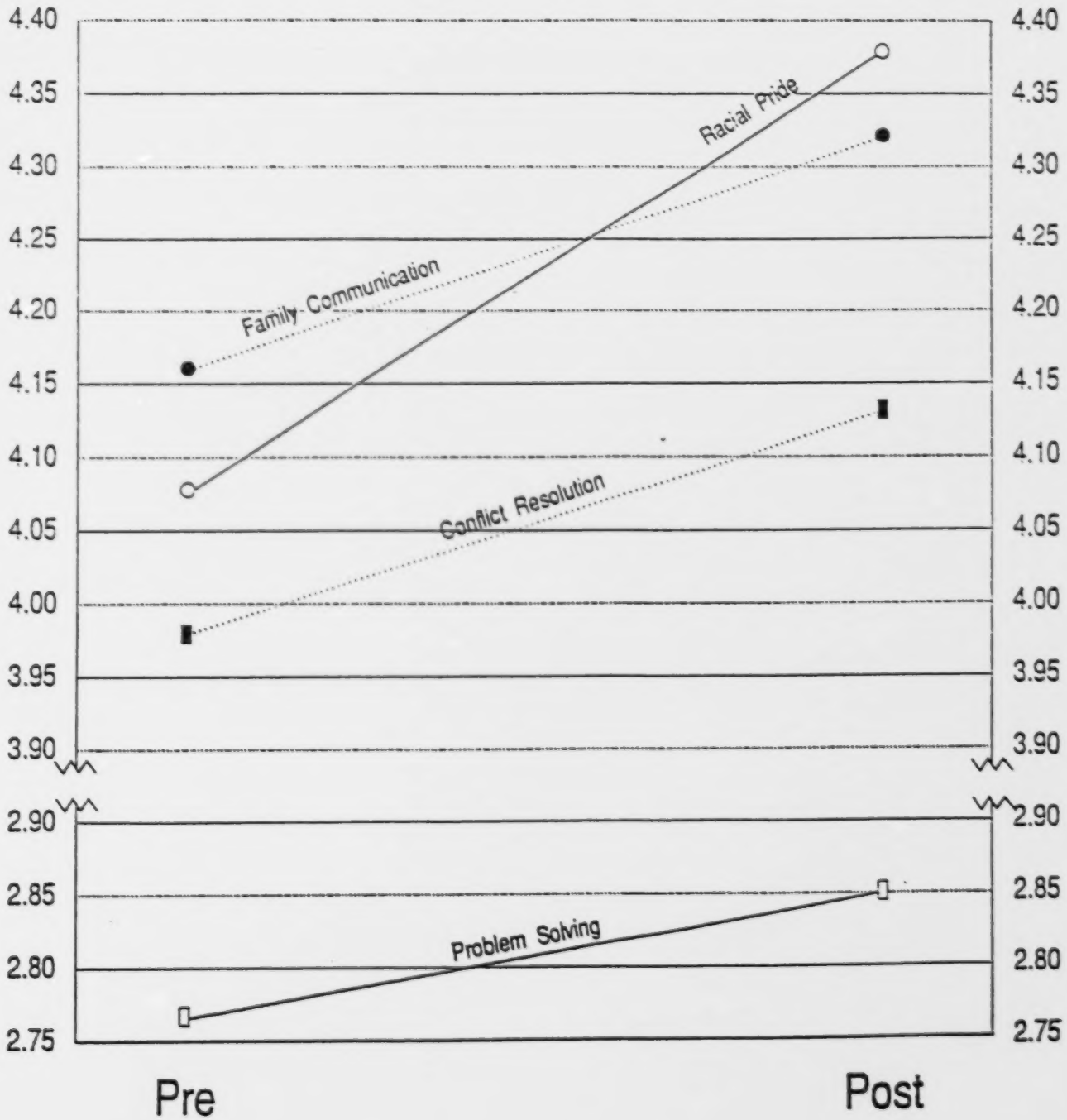
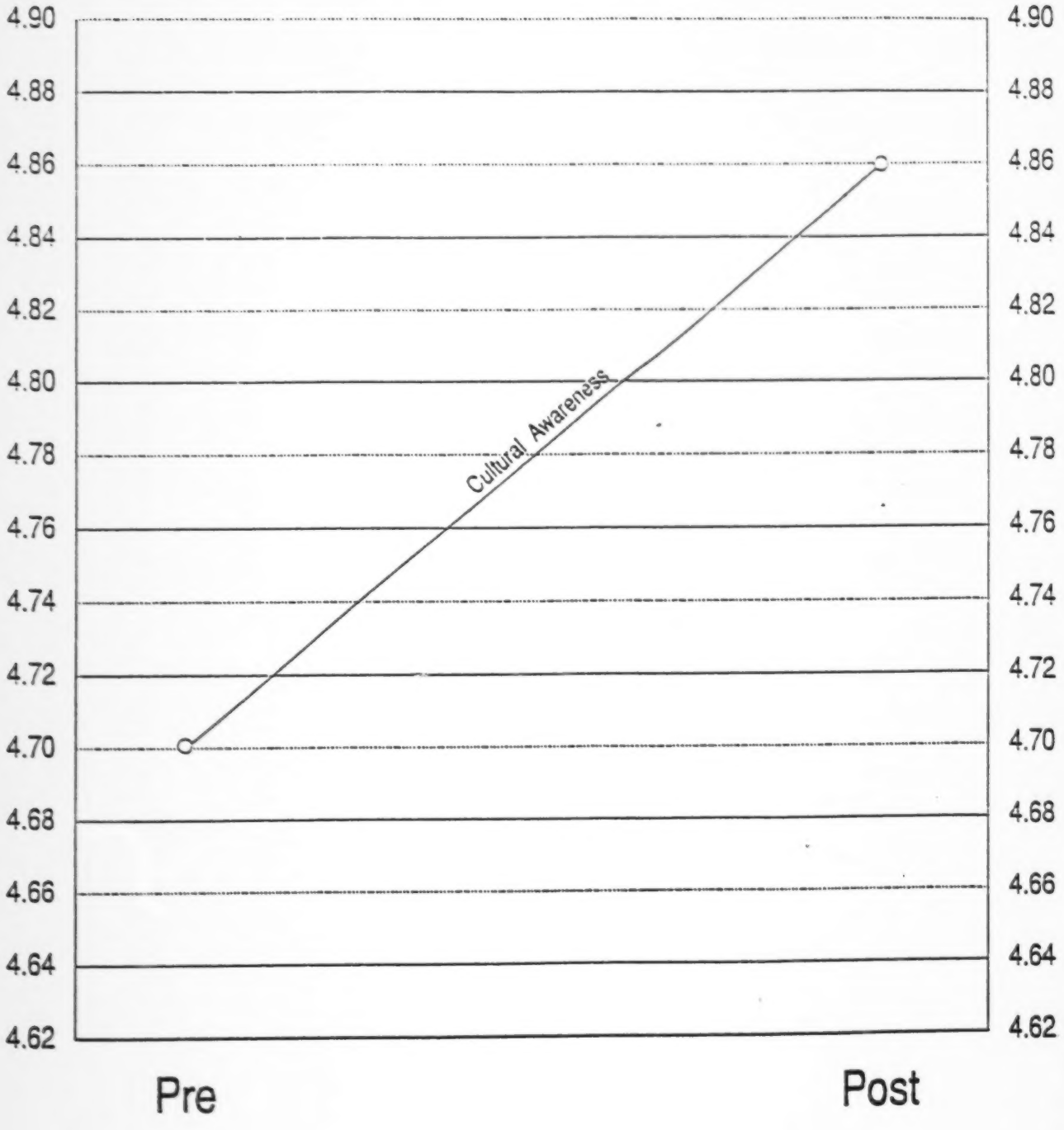


Figure 2

1992 Superstars Evaluation Results -- Youth



SUPER II

A variety of univariate t-tests and repeated-measures multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) were used to analyze the data. Statistically significant findings include the following:

Parent/Guardian Results

*improvement in all **outcome scales.**

*a comparison of **court and community agency programs** on each scale revealed a number of differences in overall mean scores and differential changes on the scales over time (See Figures 3 & 4).

Youth Results

*improvement in **knowledge of communication.**

*decrease in **frequency of use, amount of use, effects of use, and behavioral problems resulting from use.**

*a comparison of **court and community agency programs** on each scale revealed a number of overall mean differences and differential changes in scales over time.

*a comparison of **users to non-users** revealed a number of overall mean differences and differential changes in scales over time (See Figures 5 & 6).

*correlational analyses revealed a number of significant relationships between outcome and impact variables at pre- and post- test measures, indicating a relationship between these risk and resiliency factors (outcome) and drug use (impact).

Figure 3

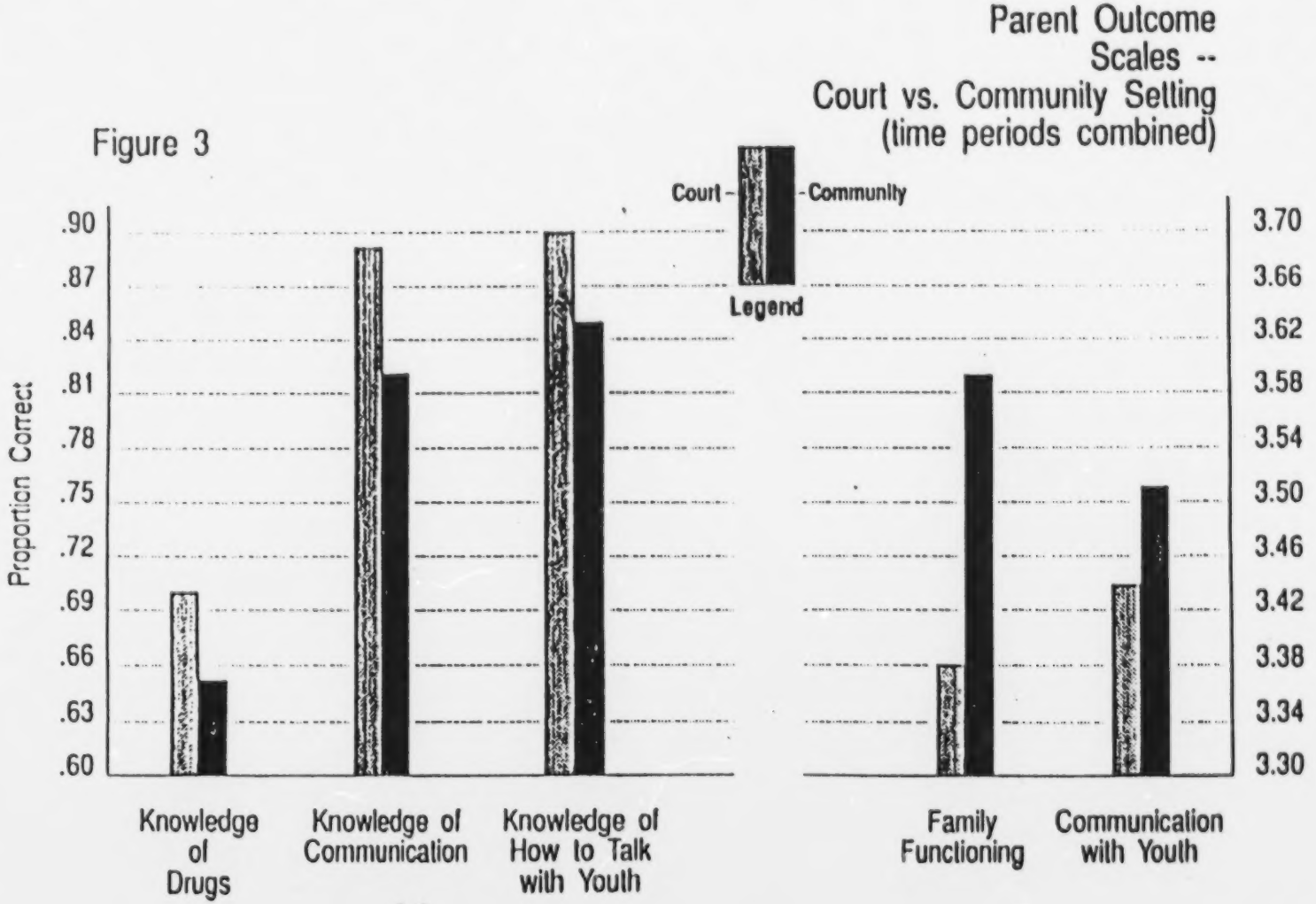

Parent Outcome Scales -- Court vs. Community Setting (time periods combined)
Court
Community
Legend
Proportion Correct
.90
.87
.84
.81
.78
.75
.72
.69
.66
.63
.60
3.70
3.66
3.62
3.58
3.54
3.50
3.46
3.42
3.38
3.34
3.30
Knowledge of Drugs
Knowledge of Communication
Knowledge of How to Talk with Youth
Family Functioning
Communication with Youth

Figure 4 Parent/Adolescent Communication & Family Functioning (Parent Ratings)

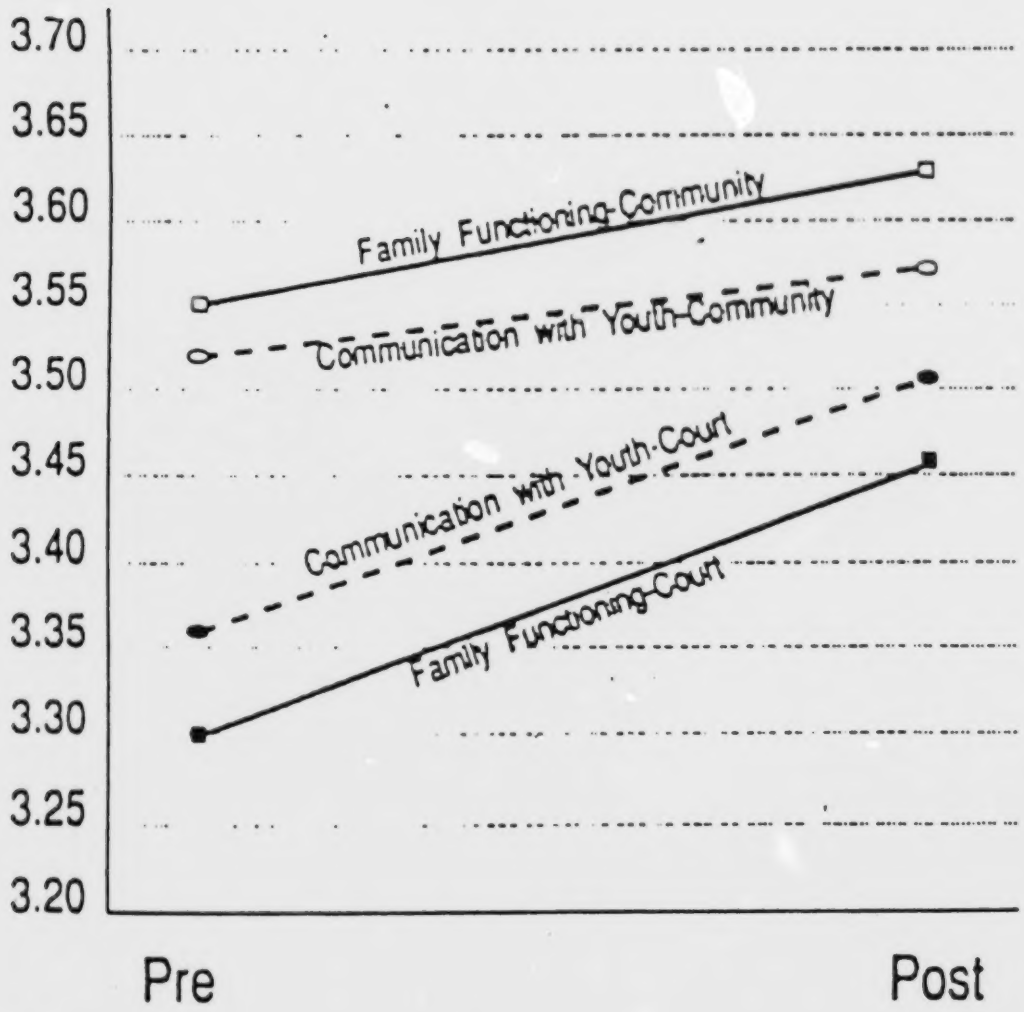


Figure 5

Amount of Drug Use
Drug Users vs.
Non-Drug Users

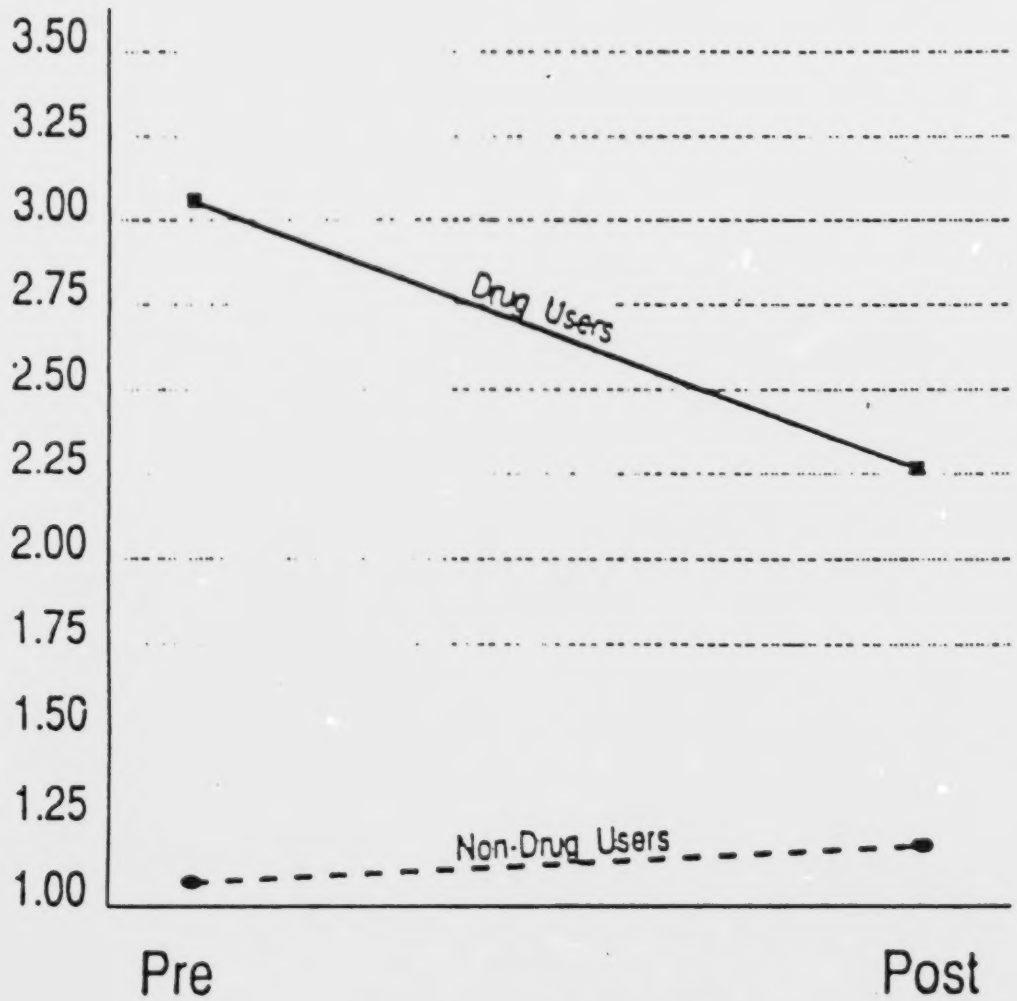
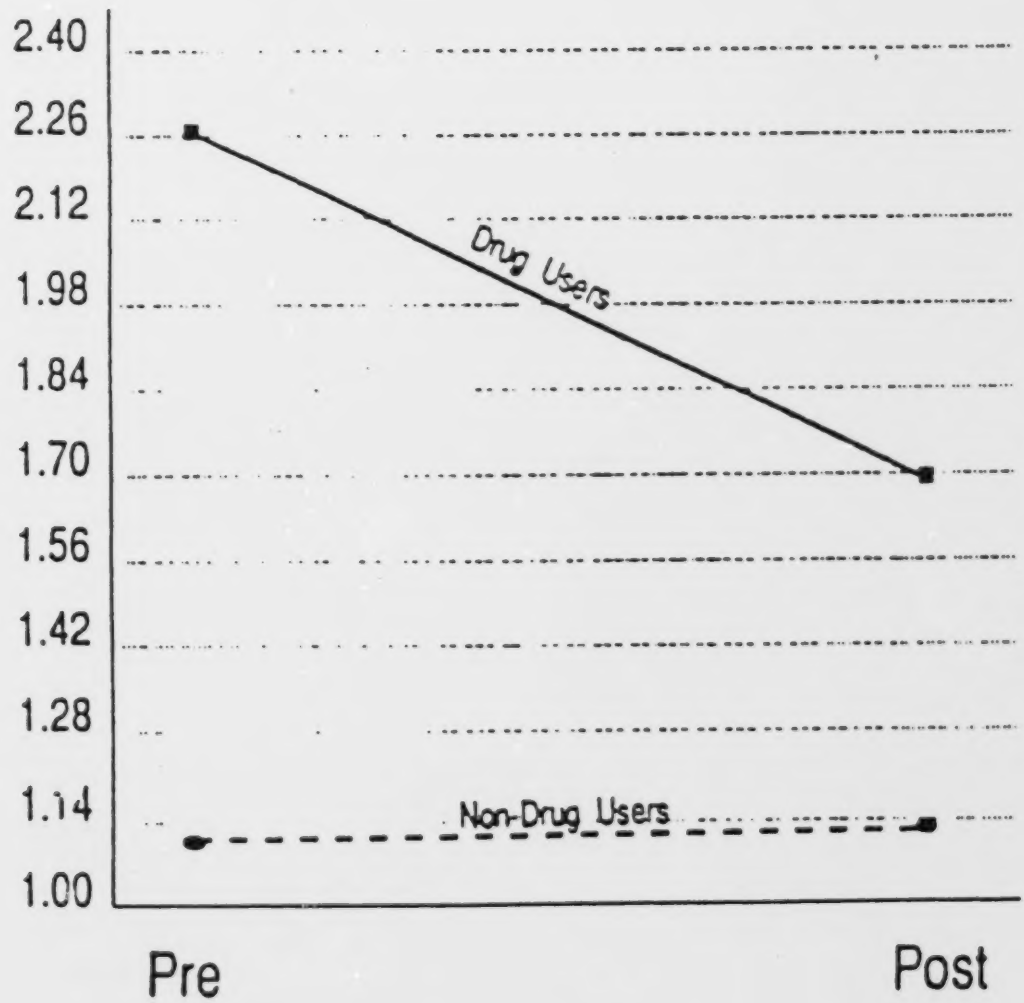


Figure 6

Frequency of Drug Use
Drug Users vs.
Non-Drug Users



*youth court data revealed a significant decrease in substance related offenses as well as overall offenses based on the number of court contacts per person from three months prior to participation in the SUPER II program to three months immediately following, and to one year later.

DISCUSSION

Evaluation results indicate that both the SUPER STARS and the SUPER II programs affected positive change in variables hypothesized to impact drug use. The SUPER STARS intervention served to enhance youths' feelings about themselves and their families. Such positive self-esteem and good family relations act as protective factors in preventing substance use. Moreover, these resiliency factors may be further strengthened by the youths' increased interest and understanding of the African-American culture (cultural awareness). Finally, youths' increased willingness to talk with their parents about problems suggests an improvement in decision-making skills as well as in family communication.

Parent/guardian results provide further evidence for improvement in family relations. The significant positive changes occurring in family communication, family pride, conflict resolution, and problem solving skills indicate an overall improvement in family functioning. Thus, although youths' reported drug use was minimal both before and after the program,

strengthening these resiliency factors may help protect these youth from future drug use. However, long-term follow-up measures were not assessed in this study but would be required to determine this type of impact.

SUPER II results suggest that youth were positively impacted by the intervention when measured on frequency, amount, and effects of drug use factors. Youth court data indicated significant reductions in substance related offenses as well as overall offenses after participating in the SUPER II program. The significant reductions in drug use behaviors were accompanied by significant improvements in some of the intermediary outcome variables which had been hypothesized to mediate the relationship between the intervention (SUPER II) and youth drug use. Other youth outcome variables showed no change.

The results of the 1-tailed t-tests did reveal significant changes in the hypothesized directions for several youth outcome variables. It is possible that substantial changes in some of the outcome variables did not have time to develop in the period between pre- and post- measurements, but could have occurred between the pre- and follow-up period, when alcohol and drug use was measured. The significant changes on the knowledge of communication scale but not on the behavior scales (knowledge being a typical precursor to behavior change) offer support for this premise. Behavioral problems resulting from use, and frequency, amount, and effects of youth drug use significantly decreased from pre- to post- measurements.

Results further indicated that parents/surrogates significantly increased their knowledge of drugs, knowledge of effective discipline, family functioning, communication with youth, and esteem for youth.

Since results for both programs are for an experimental group only and are not compared to a control group, the overall positive results for youth regarding drug use cannot be causally attributed to the SUPER II intervention. Similarly, positive changes in outcome measures for youth and adult SUPER STARS participants can not be causally attributed to program attendance. However, results have remained consistent and in some respects have strengthened over SUPER STARS' three years of existence and SUPER II's five years of existence, indicating reliability of the findings. In addition, changes in these variables over a short period of time are not realistically expected in the absence of intervention.

For more information, contact James G. Emshoff, Ga. State Univ. Atlanta, GA 30303 (404)651-2029.

Also, see Bruce, C. & Emshoff, J. (1992). The SUPER II Program: An Early Intervention Program. Journal of Community Psychology, OSAP Special Issue.

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